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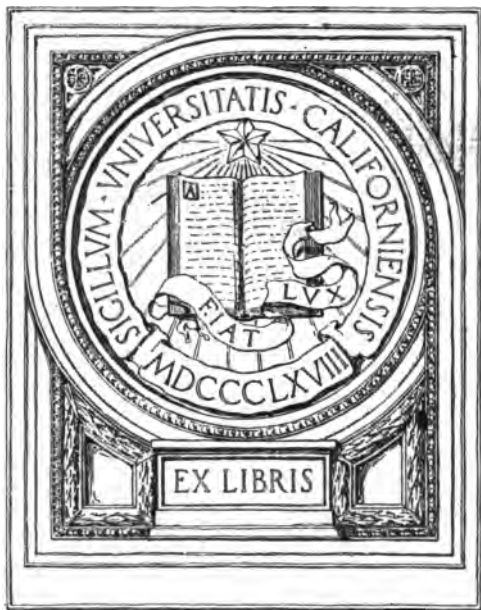
THE QUEST

JAMES H. COUSIN

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The Sleep of the King
The Marriage of Lir & Níve

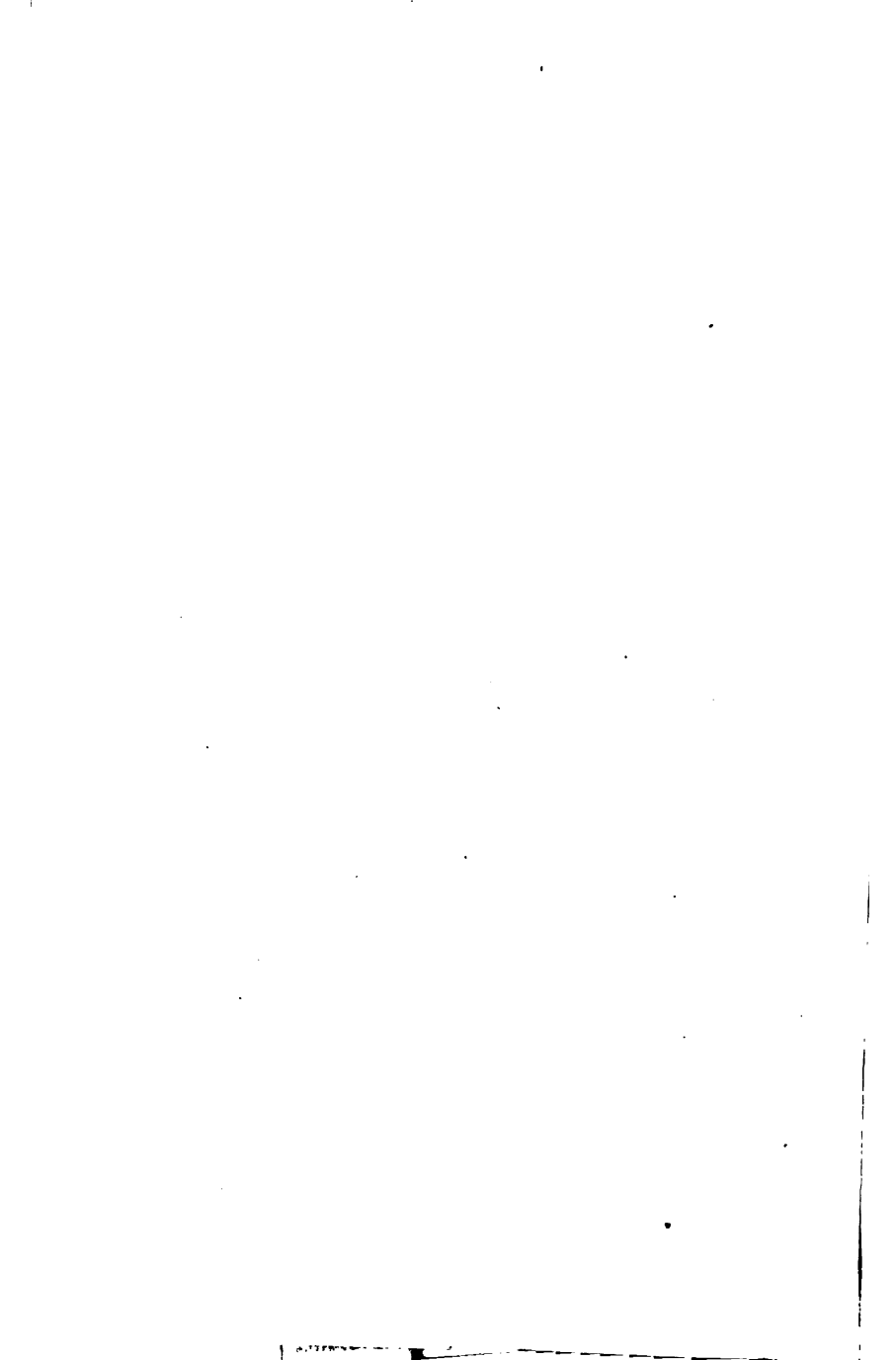
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THE QUEST

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BEN MADIGHAN AND OTHER POEMS.

SUNG BY SIX (Collaborated).

THE BLEMISHED KING AND OTHER POEMS.

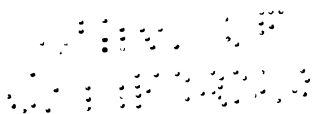
THE VOICE OF ONE AND OTHER POEMS.

All the above are at present out of print.

THE QUEST

BY

JAMES H. COUSINS



MAUNSEL AND CO., LIMITED
96, MIDDLE ABBEY ST., DUBLIN

1908

PRINTED AT THE



BY PONSONBY & GIBBS

THE
NEW
SPRINTING
PRESS

PK 6005
C 82

Q4

1908

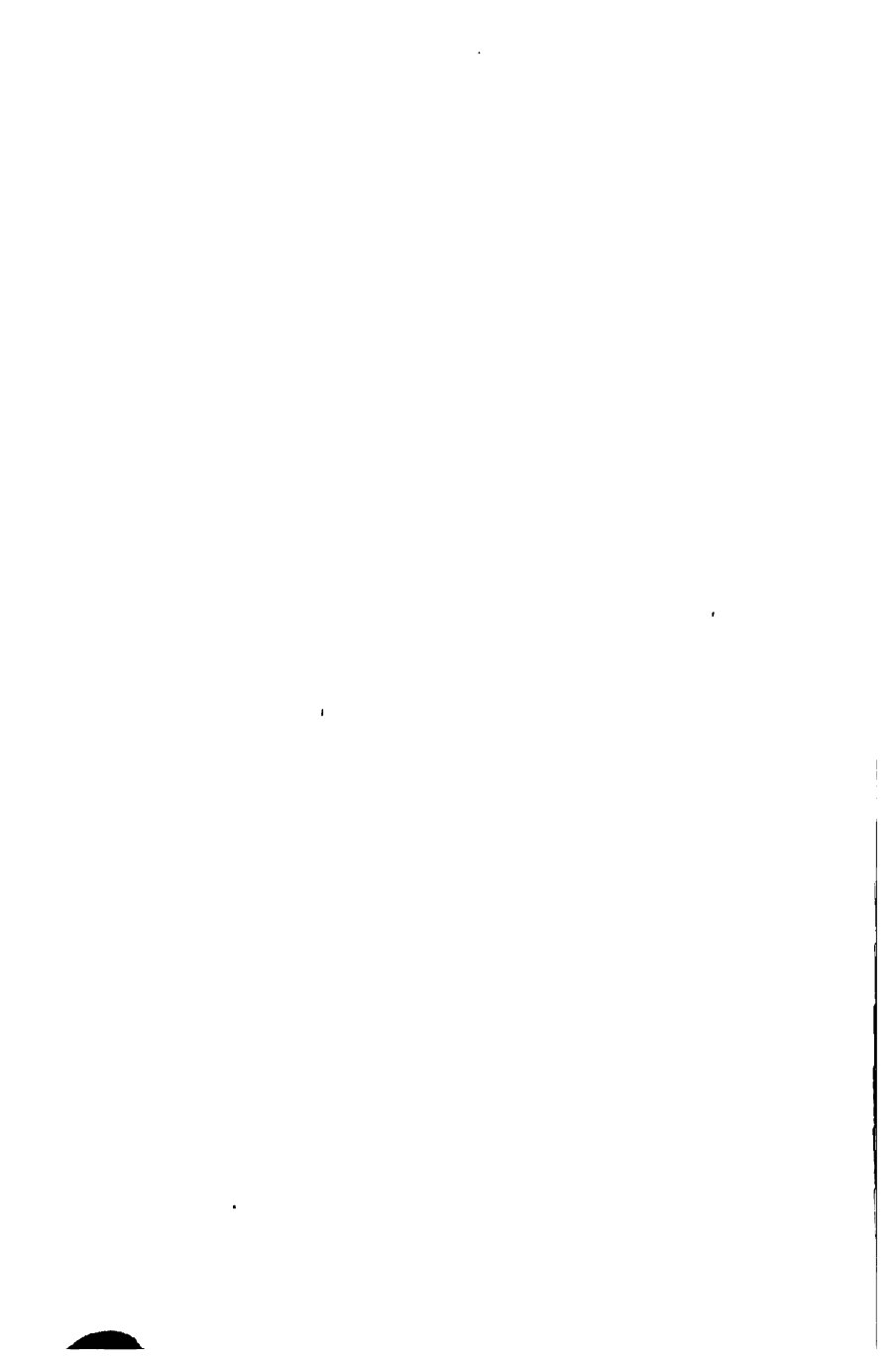
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TO MY WIFE

*I said : " Since golden dust of garnered sheaves
Dulls in each crevice of the threshing-floor,
And swift sweet wings that seek a sunnier shore
Have left a troubling silence 'neath our eaves :
I will arise, tho' Earth in Autumn grieves,
And bear with pipes and dancing to her door
Harvest of Dreams from Fields of Ancient Lore." ...
Alas ! I bring a few poor fallen leaves.*

*Yet of my leaves I twine for your loved brows
This chaplet,—yours : not mine,—for you have trod
My being's bounds ; yours is the hand that ploughs
And sows, and draws new life from the dead sod ;
And you have moved among my drooping boughs
And stirred them with a wind that comes from God.*

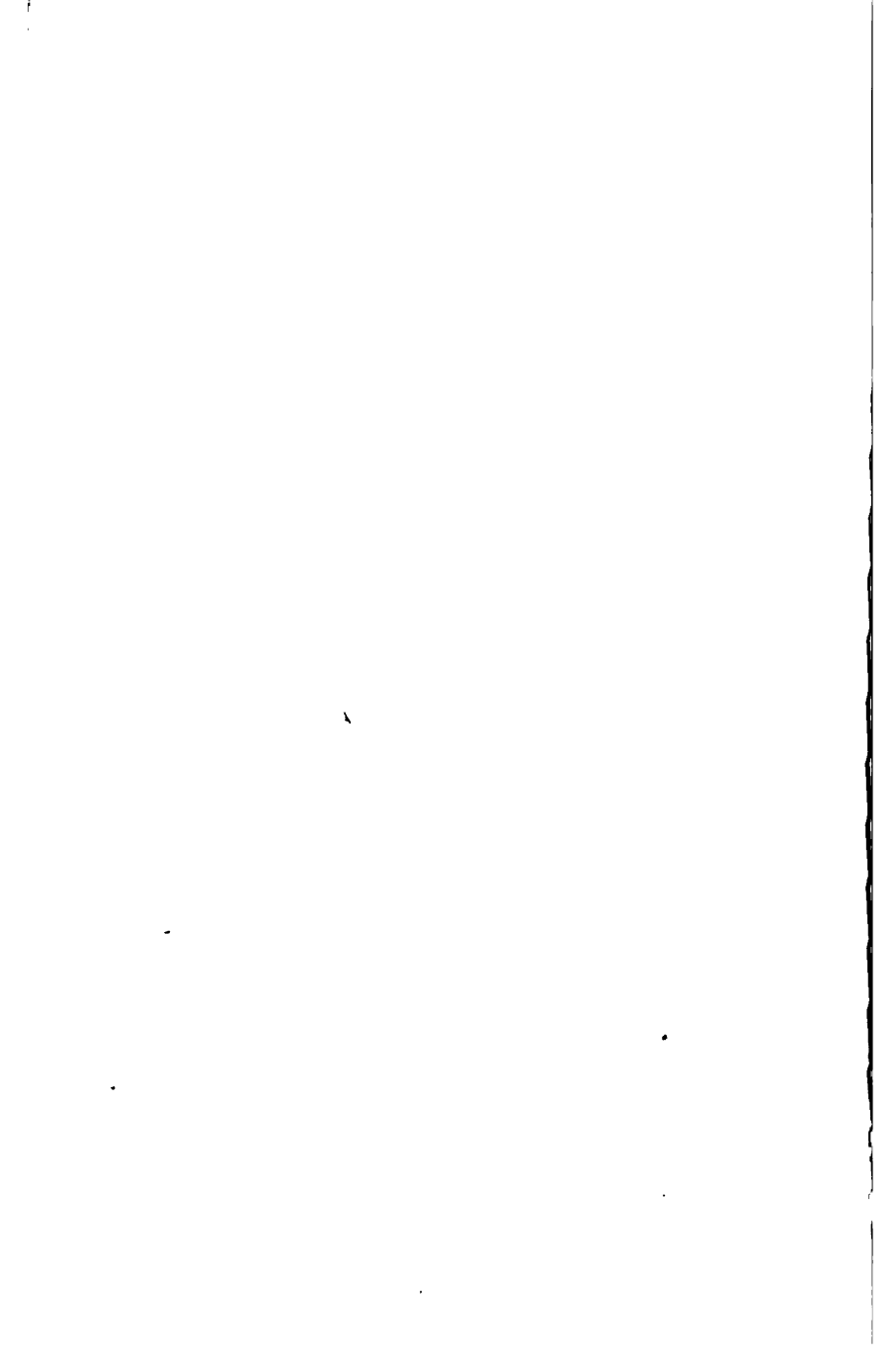
Autumn, 1906.



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THE GOING FORTH OF DANA



THE GOING FORTH OF DANA

WRAPPED in His robes of Everlasting Light
 Whose shadow is the splendour of the noon,
 The Nameless One brooded a lonely dream
 Of suns and stars that pulsed along the veins
 Of uncreated night, and, brooding, said :
One for the Seed, but for the Sowing, Twain, . . .
 And Dagda stood with Dana at His side.

Then spake the Nameless One : " Behold, I Am,
 But Thou shalt Be. The Spring is nigh at hand,
 And who would hold it needs must sow and sow
 Unceasingly."

So Dagda and Dana passed
 Forth from His Presence : He to find the Seed,
 And She to scatter : One, yet ever Twain.
 And as They passed, the Eternal Silence moved,
 Trembled, and flowed into a mighty Word
 Wherein all expectation gathered up
 A rumour as of Spring, and sundering earth,
 And opening things, and under moist young leaves

THE GOING FORTH OF DANA

Thin pipings and a going to and fro
Of tender shades.

Across ethereal fields
Dana moved slowly, scattering the Seed
That fell and flamed in gold of heavy corn,
Nor paused, till o'er the fields a Shadow passed
—As might some strange new thought across a face
Wrapped in a waking dream—and by Her side
One stood and said : “Thy hand doth heavy grow,
Thine eyes wax weary of the flaming gold
That burns along Thy fields unquenchably,
And burns into Thy heart. Rest Thee awhile.
From whence Thou camest I have come, and fain
Would sow Thy Seed for Thee.” But Dana said :
“ I sow and sow that Spring may thus endure,
For if I pause, the Harvest will be here,
And, million-mouthed, will cry within my heart
For toiling hands, and heavy-beaded brows,
And bending backs, and hot and aching feet,
And all the world that now is folded up
In silence : therefore do I sow and sow.”
Then He who moved beside Her spake again :
“ Since rest may not be Thine, my feet shall tread
From furrow unto furrow with Thine own,
And handful for Thy handful scatter far
If so Thou wilt it.” He stretched His hand

As though He tenderly would touch Her arm
That wave-like rose and fell, white as the Moon
Glimmering among the shades of some deep wood
When odorous winds breathe morning, and the first
Obeisant bend and rise, and fill the eye
With silvery glories broken by eclipse.
Then She within whose bosom sorrow and joy,
All wisdom and all folly, peace and strife,
Mingled, and set within Her steadfast eyes
The passion of Divine dispassion, turned,
And tenderly unto His tenderness
Inclined Her head. He from Her basket took
A handful of the Seed that more and more
Broad-scattered grew no less, and o'er the fields
Flung it afar, and when it fell laughed loud
And vanished.

Straightway sprang to fullest bloom
Innumerable flowers. About Her feet
Violet and Pansy trembled with delight
At so great life : across the farther fields
The Hyacinth trailed like a faint blue mist ;
While at the foot of heavy-fronded Ferns
The Cowslip's little rocket skyward shot,
And earthward fell in throbbing yellow stars ;
And through the Marigold's low smouldering fire
The crimson Tulip flickered like a flame.

Then, as a babe uplifts ecstatic hands
And downward draws a face that smiling bends
Above its own, and takes a proffered kiss,
So the fair flowers the fairer Dana drew
And drank Her rapturous kisses, as she knelt
And buried Her immortal face for joy
Among their fluttering splendours.

Suddenly,

As if a Voice had leaped from highest Heaven
To deepest Hell, and on the nether floor
Rebounded Heavenward smitten sore, and scarred,
And scattered in a million babbling tongues
—Though none had spoken—Dana raised Her head,
Her fingers fondling still the beauteous flowers,
And through a sudden guilt that rioted
Along Her veins and burned upon Her cheek,
Saw Dagda standing where, a moment since,
Another stood. A trouble in Her face
Troubled His heart, yet motionless He stood,
Nor spake a word, but o'er the waving fields
Cast His all-seeing and all-knowing eyes,
And mused in silence till the silence broke
Wave-like in one loud word in Dana's heart,
And million-mouthed cried out for toiling hands,
And aching feet, and heavy-beaded brows,
For Spring had passed and Harvest was at hand.

Then Dagda stooped and kissed His kneeling
Spouse,
Saying : " The Day is passing into days,
And all that Is to all that is To Be,
For Spring has passed and Harvest is at hand,
And who shall gather but who scattereth ?"
Then all Her soul went out in one great sigh,
As earthward Dana sank, and left Her face
Pale with majestic sorrow unexpressed,
And eloquent of the multitudinous world
Of unbegotten things that in Her heart
Clamoured to be. Prostrate among the flowers
Wherein all Beauty bloomed, and all Delight
Danced to the reed of newly-wakened winds,
She quenched Her burning eyes, and round their stems
Bent like a scythe Her arm whereon Her head
Rested, but found no rest, for rest was o'er,
And in Her ears a Voice of thunder called :
One for the Seed, and for the Sowing Twain :
But for the Ripening Three, for Reaping, Seven,
And seven times seven for the garnering.
So Dana wept ; but Dagda, bending low,
Smoothed the wet locks that clung about Her face,
And voiced the thought that stumbled in Her mind
As one o'er-weighted : " Whoso scattereth
Must reap, and reaping calls for many hands

To cut, to bind, and on the threshing-floor
Beat out the Grain and garner . . . Therefore, Thou
Within whose breast all sorrow, all delight,
All weakness and all strength commingle, Thou
Who from unutterable Light came forth
With me co-equal, co-eternal, Thou
Shalt break Thy virgin cincture, and shalt give
Seven Sons to reap Thy Harvest: Thou shalt tread
The weary Wheel that spins the whirling worlds
Till Thine almighty Sons shall come again
With shoutings, when across the farthest fields
The latest wain bears home its glittering load
Of sheaves that quicken for a Spring to be.”
He paused; and Dana, smiling through Her tears,
Raised to His outstretched hand Her own, and rose,
And stood erect, and said: “The Way is long,
And I must go alone,—yet not alone,
For That which moves within me to the Birth
Is Thou.” He kissed Her forehead. In the East
A crimson glory flashed along the fields,
And from its heart a burning Spear out-leaped
And struck Her brow with palpitating Fire,
So that Her eyes, smitten with sudden Light,
Moved darkly to and fro, and seeing nought
Save darkness, turned unto the Fire again,
And gazed until the Fire itself grew dark,

And in its heart, mirrored in blackest Night,
She saw the smoke of battles yet to be,
And heard harsh voices shouting after peace :
Whereunto Dana, stretching yearning hands,
Moved as a sleeper passing from a sleep.

* * * * *

At length, foot-weary, Dana sought the shade
Of whispering trees, beside a cataract
Whose flashing waters, gathered by the Sun
And cloud-borne to a sheer white summit, fell
And foamed among tall ferns, and laughing leaped
From rock to rock, and whirled at Dana's feet
In glistening garrulous eddies : thence they flowed

Among the mellow glooms of budding oaks,
And slipped into the silence of a lake
On whose fair bosom dreaming lilies lay
Pure as the cool white blossom of the dawn.
Upon a bank o'er-laid with moss and thyme,
Dewy at noon, but softened by the sun
To odorous warmth, She sat. Above Her head
A Hazel rustled, shattering heavy sheaths
From which ripe fruit fell flashing in the pool
Beneath Her, as She laved Her burning feet
And rested. But across Her rest there came
A murmur of Seven Names as yet unnamed,
And with the wind that bore it came the scent
And sound of seething billows of bursting corn,—
But never voice of Reaper.—Dana rose,
Saying: "The Way is long, and I alone
Must tread it, and the Wheel that spins the worlds."
But, ere She went Her way, She, thirsting, bent
And from the glittering circles of the pool
Lifted unto Her lips a cooling draught
That spun within Her pearly hollowed hand.
Through Her white fingers fell a sparkling shower
That broke in plummy sprays, and caught the Light
In seven little rainbows which Her eyes
Wove into one. She drank the draught and turned
And crossed the deepening gloom of leafing Oaks,

And touched the margin of the silent lake
Where, in the reeds, a Heron, silver-white,
Waited and watched with sidelong searching eye
The pebbly shallows. On the grassy marge
Dana moved mournfully, nor raised Her head
Till in the reeds a shudder of silver broke
In one soft wave that laughed across Her path,
Tinkling in tiny tumults about Her feet,
And, sighing, passed away. Then Dana looked
And marked where, high upon a rocky ridge,
The Heron stood, jet-black against the Moon
That, vapour-veiled, and blanching like a Bride
Within whose heart a terrible delight
Woos and repels, rose rounding to the full,
And with it a chill Mist.

So Dana turned
For comfort to the West. Upon the Hills
A passionate glory like a Lover lay,
And stretched wild arms that burned across the Sky
And, closing round Her, clasped Her in a thrill
Of flaming ecstasy, so that Her feet,
Weary no more, but swift with all Desire,
Flew like a glimmer of light along the grass,
And vanished in the Flame upon the Hills.

* * * * *

Then through the Dusk a murmur of Seven Names
Weighted with travail trembled round the world ;
And from the East a Night-wind, scurrying, swept
The moon-pale Mists into a wheeling drift
Of ghosts that jostled under new-lit stars,
And mingled shadowy shapes in one great cloud
That sank in breathless gloom from East to West.

THE SLEEP OF THE KING

THE SLEEP OF THE KING

Conn—The Hundred-Fighter, High King of Erinn.

Connla—His son.

Fairy Princess.

Coran—A Druid.

Fairy Chorus.

SCENE.—A Forest Glade, green bank in background. Enter Conn, crowned, with Connla, facing sunset, the former leaning heavily with his hand on the latter's shoulder.

Connla (speaking as they advance).

Now to the mighty pillars of the day
Night puts a mightier shoulder. In the West
Smoulder the shattered glories, piled on high
As tho' a King were passing to his urn.

Conn (as if to himself, pausing and placing his hand on his head).

“As tho' a King were passing to his urn.”

Connla. My father, thou art sad.

Conn. Nay, nay, not sad :

The quiet of the woods is on my heart,

The silence that is in the end of days.

Connla. But wherefore didst thou pause ?

Conn. I know not wherefore.

It may be I am tired and yearn for sleep—

For I have come long leagues, and in my hair

The wayside dust is matted with the mists

Of leafy valleys. (*Approaching bank.*) Let us rest awhile.

Coran the Druid chants beyond the woods,

And binds the sacred oak upon his brow :

The watchers pass along from tent to tent,

And all is well.

Connla. For well thy potent arm

Swayed the broad-sword till it outlived its use.

Now Eire's hills from Springtime unto Harvest

Thrill with the joy of sowing and of reaping ;

Her happy duns from Harvest-time till Spring

Are merry with the murmur of the quern :

In peace her children come, her old men go,

And all the year is girt about with song,

And thou art in the song, my King, my father.

Conn. Sometimes my heart grows weary of my name,

And weary of the sound of harp and song,

And hungers for great peace.

Connla. And here is peace.

And here we rest, as willing captives bound
In the sweet thralldom of the regnant Night.

[They have disposed themselves on the bank. Conn has laid his crown aside, and rests against the bole of a tree. Connla is stretched at his feet, his head upon Conn's knees. Connla repeats as to himself:]

Rest, rest, sigh and jest,
Wise and foolish, gay and grave;
Down, down, sword and crown—
Sleep is master of King and slave.

[They both drift into sleep.]

A voice (heard in the distance chanting).

Night with ruddy lip,
Sips the dregs of Day,
Swooning o'er the world in sleep,
Deep as the sleep of a child.

[They both stir sleepily.]

Conn. Coran, the druid, chants.

Connla. His voice is weak,
And far away.

Conn. The woods drink up its depth :
What reaches us is but the flying spray.

[Both drift into sleep again.]

Voice (coming nearer). Now beneath the quicken
Thicken sombre shades.

THE SLEEP OF THE KING

In the glades the fairies dance
Underneath white stars that glance
Over wood and wild
Sleeping like a child.

*[Fairy Princess has entered and observed the sleepers.
As she approaches and scrutinises them, there is
heard :*

Fairy Chorus. The sun dropped down the sky, and fell
Into a golden crucible,
From which uprolled
Clouds flushed with fire that curved and curled,
And we shook them, and flooded half the world
With gold.

*[They laugh. The Princess takes the crown and puts
it on Connla's head. As she puts a spell over Conn's
brow, again is heard :*

Fairy Chorus. We are the dusky sunset brood,
Pursuing the daylight, yet ever pursued,
And with laugh and shout
From caverns of cloud we roystering came,
And the last of the lingering sunset-flame
Blew out. *[They laugh loudly.*

Princess (beckoning). Here a King lies, overthrown
By a foe he ne'er has known,
One who never crossed his sight,
Yet who slays him night by night.

Dance, ye fairies, dance, and sing ;

Sleep is conqueror of the King.

Chorus. Dance, dance, dance and sing ;

Sleep is conqueror of the King.

[*They laugh boisterously. Connla stirs as if awaking.*
Princess (waving fairies away). Ah, he awakes. The sweet
and princely face

Lights like a morn of Spring beneath a cloud

Of glowing gold. Away, ye twilight ones,

Shake now the Branch of Night, and let its bells

Tremble with music, till the souls of men

Bloom upward thro' the soil of Sleep, and flower

And fructify in gardens no man tills.

Connla (awake and listening). A sound of ripples round a
slanted prow

Came thro' my slumber. Do I sleep or wake ?

Princess. The King doth sleep, and I have crowned thee
King.

Connla (rising). Thou—Who art thou ?

Princess. I have not any name,

For I have many ; one is in my heart,

And whosoever findeth that finds all.

Connla. But what art thou, and whither dost thou come ?

Princess. I am the lonely one amid the throng ;

I am the royal beggar at the door

Of hushed and listening hearts. Among the dew

At dawn I wander, and at eve I breathe
On upturned faces round the fires of men.
I have a throne among the ageless stars,
And with the waving grass and fluttering moth,
And with the infant smile on aged lips,
And with th' immortal dreams of mortal hearts.

Connla. Fame hath indeed been envious of thy fame,
Or like a poet stricken dumb in song
With rapture of his theme. At fair or feast
No song of thee has passed across the harps,
Tho' thou art not unworthy of the praise
Of King or bard, thou beauteous nameless one!

Princess. Men praise not me on strings that break and
fall;

Men praise me not in words that thrill and pass;
No song of me is carved on withering staves;
My praise is in the hush between their songs,
And in the music of the leaning spear
In battle pauses, when the running rings
Crowd close as gossips, garrulous of peace,
O Connla of the flowing golden hair!

Connla (scrutinising her). Thou namest me, and yet I
know not thee—

But, stay! I think that face has touched my dreams
With silver light, and drawn my being's tide,
And beckoned me by old and foot-worn ways

Thro' vales and over mountains, to a shore
Where crawled a bearded wave by crumbling caves ;—
And beckoned me across a tranquil sea
Into the golden glories of a dawn
Beyond the tides of death and birth, and sleep—
But wherefore hast thou wakened me from sleep ?
Princess. Because thou art the best-beloved of men.

Connla. I am indeed in honour of the King,
And blessed with noble friendship ; but for me
No princess sighs at mention of my name,
Nor pensively out-stares the morning star.

Princess. Yet thou art not unloving.

Connla. Nay, for me
There breathes a rapture in the silent hour
When, in the primrose twilight, flower and tree
Exhale great life, unbosoming to love
Their perfumed secrets ; when, on Usna's hill,
The serried forests raise their mighty spears,
A shadow army wounding the wan sky
With prayer, while from their hearts the ring-dove's
 coo
Comes iterant of love, and calls me forth
To find my love.

Princess. Now she has found out thee.

Connla. O voice that often whispered from the stars !
O eyes that looked from dim, fantastic caves !

O arms that I have felt about the world !
Now do I see thee, hear thee, now possess
Exultant as high noon !

*[He approaches as if to enfold her, but she, with a
gesture of tender command, restrains him.]*

Princess. Not yet, not yet.

I am not won by words.

Connla. Then say what deed

Shall win thee ? Speak—and ere another dusk
A thousand, and a thousand, I shall slay.

[Draws his sword.]

Princess. Nay, not in crimson sod or flaming pyre
Do I rejoice. The scent of wayside flowers,
The chirp of little birds within the nest,
The murmured words that quiet aching hearts,
Are more to me than horn or battle-call.
My king shall mount no perilous throne ; my throne
Shall bear no power-proud king. Put by the sword :
I am not won by deeds.

Connla (sheathing sword). Oh tell me, then,
How I may win thee ?

Princess. Follow where I go.

Connla. Whither, oh whither, and how long the way ?

Princess. A little past the beating of the heart ;
A little past the finger-tip of faith ;
It may be in the smoking duns of men ;

It may be in the solitude of hills ;
It may be by the rock and querulous wave ;
It may be in the flaming of the furze,
There thou shalt find me, know me, there possess.
Come, follow. See, the King wakes.

*[She moves away beckoning. Conn sighs and stirs.
Connla makes to go, but is held back. He puts his
hand in perplexity to his head, and feeling the crown,
braces himself and sets it where it was at first.]*

Princess (commanding). Connla. *[He turns towards her.]*

Princess (entreatingly). Come.

*[He approaches her with outstretched arms. She
disappears.]*

Conn. Connla, my son, where art thou ?

Connla (pausing). I am here.

Conn. Thou art a voice that comes from anywhere
Across a moonlit lake. Thou standest far ;
Come near. I am beset by troublous dreams,
And have sore need of comfort.

Connla. Nay, dream on,
Lest thou shouldst wake to troubles never dreamed.

Conn. What troubles ? Am not I the Hundred-Fighter,
High King of Erinn ? I have strength to break
The iron stroke of war, and now, when Peace
Lays a white hand upon the brow of Erinn,
What need have I for fear, save in my dreams ?

Why dost thou stand afar? Why dost thou gaze
Like watchers by the sea?

Connla. Oh! very far

I have to go, and needs must look before.

Conn. But whither dost thou go?

Connla. I know not whither.

Conn. But wherefore dost thou go?

Connla. I know not wherefore,

Only her lips said: "Connla, follow me."

Conn (half-rising). And who is she?

Connla. She has not any name,

For she has many; one is in her heart,

And whosoever findeth that finds all.

Conn (rising). Now have I need for fear! Coran! Coran!

Come hither, Druid. Connla, my son, my son,

Surely thou wilt not go and leave me lonely.

[*Coran has entered on one side, and Princess, unobserved,
on opposite.*]

Connla. She is the lonely one amid the throng;

She called, and I must go.

Conn. Speak! speak! Coran,

Or I am beggared of all hope and love.

Send forth thy spell and break the spell that binds

And draws my son away. (*Coran raises his hands
above his head. Princess raises a finger at same time.*)

Speak, speak, Coran!

Coran (dropping his hands). A greater spell than mine has
broken mine,

And I am emptied of all power.

Conn.

Oh, then,

Since naught avails, and thou, my son, must go,

I shall obey a call I have not heard,

And go with thee.

Coran.

Stay, stay, O King of Erinn!

The son deserts the father, but shall he,

The royal father of his people, go

And leave them fatherless?

Conn (taking up his crown in his hand). My land, my children

I cannot leave, tho' I am childless left.

Coran. O Connla, son of Conn the Hundred-Fighter,

Be mindful of the knees that thou hast climbed—

Conn. Which but for age would bend before thee now,

Beseeching thee to leave me not, but stay.

Connla. She is the royal beggar at the door

Of hushed and listening hearts.

Coran.

Oh, if thy heart

Is weary of the light in human eyes,

The warmth of human hands, bethink thee, then,

Of what the future holds for thee of strength,

Of power, of place, of happy days, and nights

Heavy with harvest and the sound of chants

Around the board—

Conn (offering his crown). Where thou shalt sit as King.

Connla. Her throne shall bear no power-proud King; her
King

Shall mount no perilous throne amid decay.

Her throne is with all changeless changing things,

And with the everlasting stars.

[*A distant chant is heard as at first. Connla listens in
silent rapture.*

Conn.

Coran,

Whence comes that sound?

Coran.

The harpers tune their harps

To sing thy praise: the men of wisdom wait

To be made wise by little words of thine.

Conn (to Druid, putting on crown, resignedly). Come.

[*Conn goes away, leaning on Coran's shoulder.*

Princess (close to Connla). Come.

[*Connla goes away after the Princess. Distant harps
are heard, mingled with the Fairy Chorus. The
music slowly dies away. Night comes on.*

THE MARRIAGE OF LIR AND NIAV

THE MARRIAGE OF LIR AND NIAV

LIR, Son of Dana, Lord of the Seven Seas
That washed the Seven Islands of the World—
The chief called Eire—in the royal place
Sat in deep silence. Round His throne there stood
Seven Lords, Viceregent of the Seven Isles,
Who spake the Will of Lir because their own
Had shaped them to such semblance of the King
That, but for age, none knew them each from each.
So stood they, ranked in years, as tho' at noon
Of some great day the shadow of the King
Had clothed itself in Time, and waxed in years,
The while the King passed on from age to age
Unageing. At the silence of the King
They marvelled much, but spake not: rather, spake
In one swift glance, distilled from all the years,
A meaning not in speech. For well they knew
What mighty winds were folded in the calm
Of Lir's great brow, and how within his heart
The wave but drew a momentary breath

Ere it should sweep the borders of the Seas,
And leap upon the shores of some far Isle,
And, swift returning, bear upon its crest
The white plume of allegiance to the King.
For thus they too had come, and one by one
Laid down their lordship at the feet of Lir,
And passed again, each to his own far Isle,
And ruled it for the King, and dwelt in peace.
So year by year they came to tell the tale
Of harvest upon harvest; marsh and moor
Broken and tamed and harnessed to the will
Of happy peoples. But with each new tale
That bent with age from semblance of the old,
The pleasure of the King waxed thin, and broke
As might a garment worn beyond its time.
Then rose the King and spake: "So yet again
The year brings round the unwearying tale of peace
Whereof I weary, and your happiness
Makes misery in me. O ye faithful ones!
So well ye serve that well is turned to ill,
And I am burdened with the weight of nought.
What profits me this affluence? What avails
This peace that slumbers on its rusted harp
For lack of song? What joy is in the chant
Of what is done, save when it nerves the arm
Of those who do? for doing is all in all.

Hence! Hence! The oars are out, the sails are
spread,

The noise of billows buffeting dipping prows
Sings in my ears, and cries: 'The Sea! The Sea!
The strong salt breeze that crisps upon the lips
And turns the blood to rivers of fresh mead.'
How blows the wind?" "From Eastward," answered
one.

And thro' a window opening on the East
A strong, salt breeze blew round the hall and shook
The torch-flames, till the shadow of the King
Broke into shadows dancing with delight,
Altho' the King stood still, erect, and wrapt
In some bright dream that shone upon his face
And lit the red-gold tresses of his hair
With the soft glow of morning. "From the West,"
Another said who marked the upper clouds,
And knew the wind would blow this way and that,
And neither long, so that the leaping waves,
Whipped back upon themselves, would rear their
heads,
And snap white teeth, and shake their smoky manes,
And vex the rowers with their restiveness,
And set them snarling. "Better it were, O King!"
So spake a third, "to wait a settled wind,
And take the stride of long, unanimous waves

With strong, slow swing of sure and steady oars,
And ropes that thrill like harp-strings newly strung,
And full, stiff sails." So spake three other Lords
Likewise. And he who was the last to bend
Before the power of Lir, and rose in strength
To rule his Island, Eire, for the King,
Spake thus: "And better were it that the King,
Who is of Kings most kingly, and of men
Most manly and comely, should seek out a bride
Among the Isles that own His happy sway.
So might the love that binds them each to each
Find voice to speak the love they bear the King,
And thus be bound in love that is not bound,
Seeing 'tis but a gift themselves have given."
Then answered Lir, as tho' from out a dream:
"The Wind is from the East and from the West,
And whence upon the morrow who shall tell?
Or whither? or what fair, enchanted Isle
Lies at the place where all the Winds are furled
And harboured? Yet, what matter? To your own
Return you now; for well it were you keep
The law that binds till you have learned the law
That breaks and scatters." So they, pondering,
passed
Each to his Isle, and ruled it for the King,
And kept the law. But when their ships had rowed

Into the Night, like windward-faring gulls
That beat the air with slow and heavy wing
Across the billows, Lir, within his booth,
Put off his Crown, and cast his Robe aside,
And stole, a shadow, to a shadowy place
Where slumbrous waves moved shoreward in the dark,
And fell, and sighed, and sighing fell asleep,
Because the winds had warred themselves to peace.
There slept the King, and dreamed of One who bent
And touched His brow with lips of silvery fire,
And spake His name as tho' it were Her own,
Or one that She had given him in a dream
Some other where, and He had quite forgot.
Suddenly Lir awoke, as one who feels
A presence by his side; and o'er his mind
There passed the words: "Better it were the King
Should seek a Bride among the happy Isles
That own His sway." He rose, and slowly paced
Along the margin of the moving sea
That, in the dark, had slumbered to the full,
And musing spake: "'Twere better that the King
Should brideless live and fill a brideless urn
Than wed the weakness that His power hath broken,
Or set a flaming envy on His throne
To burn it from the world. And yet, mayhap
The day hath come to 'stablish it in strength

Beyond the shocks of time and circumstance.”
But as He spake, across His word of power
A gentle tremor thrilled, as when at eve
Along the roar of plunging battle-prows
A lonely plover mews to find his mate.
For in Lir’s heart the word of His last Lord
Had waked the memory of a tender dream
So vague, so far beyond the misty verge
Of time and sense, that to His ear it came
Like some sweet echo of a chant of love
Heard once before the gates of Birth had closed
Upon the Music that has built the worlds.
Thus musing, Lir passed onward. At His feet
The serpent-wave, white-hooded, coiled, and turned,
And, jutting silvery fangs, hissed to its home
Among the sonorous eddies of a cove
Where, dimly in the gathering dawn, a boat
Strained at its ropes and groaned for liberty.
Hither, still musing, came the King, and paused,
And said: “Thou, too, art weary of the peace
Of harbour. Thou art hungry for the sea,
And seas beyond the sea.” Smiling he marked
How, wave by wave, the boat drew near the shore,
Then swung upon the billows’ backward roll
Until upon a star-white curling crest
It shivered at the shock of straining cords,

And bowed, and sobbed itself again to shore.
Eight times the King had watched the boat draw near
And eight times swing to seaward; at the ninth
The King cried out in joy, and leaped on board,
And cut the ropes, and seized the ready oars,
And swept beyond his dim and slumbering Isles
Into a morn that broke in ruddy gold
Beneath a star.

* * * * *

Full seven times seven leagues
Beyond the last cliff of the utmost Isle
Whereon was set the royal will of Lir,
There lay a land fair as the fairest dream
That ever Bard around the hearth of Kings
Built out of flame and song. Hard by the shore
The royal house of Him whose mighty name
May not be told till First and Last are one,
Shone as a pearl upon a pearly breast
Whose rise and fall scarce moved its mirrored shape,
Yet thrilled in vibrant harmony to strains
That floated from an ever open door
And passed from lip to lip of all the winds.
Within the pillared vastness of the hall
Where neither shadow fell, nor garish light
Smote on its everlasting radiancy,

Stood Bard and Prince, chanting in unison
The praise of the King's Daughter. Upon the air
The resonant waves flowed forth and softly broke
Around the shores of Silence. Hand to hand
The Harpers smote their harps, and smiting moved
In rhythmic dance. Their locks of midnight hue
Outspread on little winds of melody
That plucked their snowy robes, and thro' their strings
Laughed silverly, and bore to Him who slipped
From pillar unto pillar to a place
Unseen, apart, low murmurs of a name
Wrapped round with music heard in many a dream.
And as the Harpers moved around the hall,
The silent throng swayed slowly side to side
So filled with joy august and lifted up
That not an eye had sight for Him who stood
Alone, apart, and flung across their song
A glad, proud glance that searched into its heart
And shone with tremors of a strange delight
As tho' the song were sung for one He had loved
Some other where beyond the gates of sleep.
Then, when the mingled joy of all that throng
Stood pinnaced upon the utmost height
Of ecstasy, there fell a tremulous hush,
As if the parted lips of all the world
Waited the word to hurl to highest heaven

One great, glad voice reverberant with acclaim.
But, as upon the breathless hour of eve,
The gentle moon, smiling amid the wreck
And splendid remnant of the flaming feast
Wherewith Day's lord had sated half the world,
Sets a cool hand on the tumultuous waves,
And soothes them into peace, and takes the throne,
And beams white love that wakens soft desire
In waiting hearts ; so in that throbbing pause
Came Niav, daughter of the King whose name
May not be named till First and Last are one.
Then all the pent-up thunder of that voice
Passed into silence and adoring calm
As in their midst She moved. And He who stood
Unseen, apart, marked how about Her form,
Clothed white as foam, Her sea-green girdle hung
Like mermaid weed, and how within her wake
There came the sound and odour of the sea,
The swift and silent stroke of unseen wings,
And little happy cries of mating birds ;
Whereat there passed across His leaping heart
A billow of white bliss that drew the streams
From all His veins, so that His paling cheek
Glowed with cool fire and silvery radiance caught
From Her moon-fairness ; and the surging tides
Of all His being mingled with the tide

Of Love that moved across the ecstatic throng
And bent and broke about Her, as a sea
That bears on glad white shoulders to the shore
A calm, triumphant swimmer. Thus She passed
Toward that exalted place whereon no King
Sits, or shall sit, till First and Last are one.
Howbeit, the Daughter of the Nameless King
Who stands within the shadow of the world,
Upon the festal eve of that glad day
Which saw Her birth, takes there Her seat and reigns
One splendid hour. But ere She set Her foot
Upon the golden precinct, o'er the throng
She cast a look of Love that found a place
In every heart, but chiefest in the heart
Of Him who stood alone, unseen, and joyed
With an immortal joy to watch the blue
Of Her calm eyes dusk with the gentle breeze
That passed across Her soul, and gleam again
With rapture of rich twilights. O'er Her brow
She passed a shell-white hand, and swept aside
Jet tresses, as the moonbeam fingers draw
The curtains of great midnight. Then She spake ;
And to the ears of Him who stood apart
Unseen, the mellow music of Her voice
Came like cool murmurs of the creamy surge
Around the shores of some enchanted isle

Where all the winds of love and hate are furled
And harboured. Thus She spake: "From year to year,
Bards! Princes! ye have loved me with a love
Not less for mine than for the love of Him
Who stands within the shadow of the World
Till First and Last are one; and year by year
Our joy has flowed together, as the pools
Among the pebbles, when the flowing tide
Has blent them in the rapture of the Sea
And filled them with its fulness. So to-day
Our hearts have mingled: yet within mine own
There moves the first faint stirring of delight
Past speech, the first low murmurs of a song
Whose end is in the stars. For know ye now,
The Day has come that chaplets all my years
With Time's glad fulness—and I stand a Queen . . .
Not yet! The hour is trembling in the sky,
And some fair shadow falls across my heart,
Cast by a Light that blinds the eye of noon,
For in that Light, One stands, and thro' all worlds
Sighs towards me—and will come! . . . Then, woe is me,
For less than I can never call me His,
And more than I must prove Himself the more
By strength or stratagem: so, less or more,
Whate'er He be, my joy is mixed with pain.
Yet He will come, He is coming. He has sent

His dream before Him. He will smite high Noon,
And bend and break the pillars of all Time,
That He may make me His, tho' all the Kings
Of all the world rage, like a storm-struck sea
Round one great rock whose kingly loneliness
Bends not tho' all the tempests' lips should blow
The billows to the stars and drown the world."
She ceased ; and from the summit of Her joy
Saw Lir, and knew, and trembled ; while the throng
Gazed question unto question, wavering
'Twixt sorrow and joy that neither went nor came,
While thro' the door that opened on the Sea
There came from rocky ledges happy calls
Of bird to bird that answered love with love.
And Lir would fain have leaped in mighty joy
The barrier of silence to Her side,
To kiss the tears from those familiar eyes
That in one look had burned thro' time and space,
And, unbeheld, had linked them soul to soul,
And smitten two eternities of dream
To one awakened bliss. But 'twixt the twain
There stood the legions of the Nameless King.
Whereat Lir's heart, vexed, stifled its great cry
For all the strength that, in His Seven Isles,
Had in a moment compassed all His will,
But being far from this enchanted isle,

Left Him but lordship of an empty name
Poised on a great and ineffectual joy.
Then Niav, half in tears and half in smiles,
As tho' to hide both tears and smiles, spake thus:
" Yet for a little while I pause, a child
That babbles on the knees of the kind past,
And strokes its tender cheek, and looks—as I—
In soft, proud eyes that weep—as you—and I,
And smile, and know not which were sweeter pain,
For sorrow and joy are one, and all the past
And all the future mingle in a kiss."
Across the throng she looked, then lightly leaped
From step to step, and at the Royal place
Stood Royally. Whereat the tremulous joy
That rippled round Her, mellowed into calm,
And lapsed in sonorous murmurs round the throne,
As Bard and Prince and all within the hall—
Save Lir and Niav gazing eye to eye—
Bent low in glad allegiance, as the tide
Falls from its fulness, baring to the view
Two rocks majestic in great loneliness
From whose rapt brows swift wings dart forth and meet
Midway above the separating sea.

* * * * *

Late in the deepening twilight of a day
That broke on Eire in a glare of gold

Too bright to beat with hammers of high noon
Into fit vessels for the wine of eve—
So fine and frail it was, Lir, by the Sea
That pushed the yellow sand, fold after fold,
Against His threshold, slowly to and fro
Paced . . . paused . . . and paced again. Seaward He
gazed

At each new pause ; or, pale and querulous,
Gazed ere He paused, and in the gritty stones
Stumbling struck sudden fire about his feet ;
The while the Sun that in the morn of pride
Came forth in robes of vast imperiousness,
Now, fronted by the challenge of the Night,
Puts on his dinted panoply of war,
And strides in steely glitter down the West
With dark drawn brows and cold indignant eye.
Again Lir paused, and looked across the Sea
As tho' for all the famine of the World
All fulness lay beyond its cloudy verge.
And as He stood and gazed, around the shore
Wave after wave hungered from stone to stone
And sighed themselves into an oozy chasm,
Where brown arms rose and fell in mute appeal
To wandering winds that cried against the Night
And Silence. Then Lir spake within Himself :
“ Not yet returned. Perhaps my Messengers

Have missed the Happy Isle where Niav dwells
Beyond that little line of topaz-gleam
Where some sweet morning opens wise pure eyes
Upon a world of Wisdom . . . Perhaps the King
Who hath no name, glad at my embassy
With gifts outshining all His eyes have seen
In His own realm, and, richer far, my love
For Him and Her whose place is at my side,
Holds them in entertainment at His board,
Pleased with great joy that heralds greater far;
And for the sake of that enduring joy
Doth hold the transient yet a little while
To taste its new and unreturning sweets—
No! No! for She would speed them from Her Isle
With the swift wind of Love, bearing the word:
“The King hath spoken—I am thine.” . . . Not yet:
Not even a speck upon the gloomy Sea
That I may fix upon, and feel the beat
Of quick ecstatic oars, and in my heart
Hoard up their happy echo. Even now,
Night like a grey-blue Heron slowly falls
And folds the wings of darkness round the world,
And She so far . . . so far. . . . O Mystery
That spills all memory on the thirsty sands,
And casts a life, once brimful of delight
In its own self, like some poor empty shell

Into the Sea . . . 'My joy,' She said, 'with pain
Is mixed whate'er he be.' . . . Nay! pain or grief
Shall ne'er be thine, since this my realm, that stands
Sevenfold in strength, and sevenfold mighty name,
Proclaim me sovereign lord of half the world,
And thus coequal of the Nameless King
Whose word shall make Thee mine, since less or
more

I am not . . . Less? . . . or more? . . . Oh, more,
far more,

For Love is might, and mighty Love the more
Adds strength to strength, and of th' eternities
That hinge upon this hour doth make a shell
To shut thee like a Pearl within its heart.
Less? . . . Infinitely less, for all that was
Of proud accomplishment, or chanted fame,
Or jewelled tribute from mine utmost Isles,
Has thro' this flame passed to a little dust
To make but one poor Ruby for Thy brow.
And I, who reared an everlasting name
To stand amid the shocks of reeling suns,
Am but an echo in a lonely place
To whisper back a name that every wave
And every wind bears hither from Thine Isle . . .
And bears my Messengers, for now I hear
The jerk of oars that quit the clinging sea,

And, backward swiftly swinging, split the spray
And scatter its flying plumes upon the wind.
They come, my Messengers. Around the prow
The foam fringe glimmers dimly thro' the dark
Like moonlight thro' a cloud that, high o'erhead,
Opens dusk hands and from a gloomy tower
Lets fall invisible leaves whose silvery pile
Broadens and brightens. . . . Yet, no song? No
shout?—

Only the deep slow moving of proud men
Confederate in stern purpose, and the hiss
Of serpent waves in sudden frenzied swirl
Around stiff oars held firm, lest at the shock
Of keel and sand the quiet carven maid
Who gazes ever onward from the prow
Should wince—and now the snarl of running ropes,
And swift, sure feet . . . Hither!—Come hither! . . .
Well? ”

Forth from the crowd of dim, hard-breathing men
That closed around the King like some great cloud
Thundrous and vibrant, stepped his foremost Lord
And spake: “Thus saith the Nameless King: ‘Know
ye
That less than She shall never call Her his,
And more than She must prove himself the more
By strength or stratagem:’ no other word.”

Then Lir a moment mused, and to His eyes
There came the fire that those around Him knew
And joyed to know, and thundered round the King
Portentous of great purpose . . . "Be it so.
Our strength shall burst the rusty gates of Dawn
And make for stratagem a quiet way
Unto my heart's desire. The lumbering wind
Swells, purposeful, and moves with quickening pace
Toward that high end whereunto every sail
Must ere an hour be set . . . so haste you, haste!"
Lir said: and straightway thro' His Seven Isles
The flame that first had kindled in His eye
Went forth from cape to cape, from hill to hill,
And under the low gloom of starless skies
Made a new sky of unrevolving stars
That spake His Will unquenched till, in His wake,
One roar of thunder under leaping prows,
With torch-lit carven maidens overlaid
With Mother-o'-Pearl, or serpents, ruby-eyed
Flaming, o'er whose proud heads great silken sails
Bore each a Moon amid the Seven Seas,
And mighty throats in one exultant shout,
Rolled onward into silence.

* * * * *

In a dawn
Of pearl and topaz, Niav, from a dream

Of yearning hands that groped about the skies
To find Her, and swift voices thro' the night
Whispering Her name from star to star close-linked
Into a cincture narrowing round the world,
Arose, and with Her Maidens softly passed
From shadow unto shadow to the shore.
Swiftly they sought a cave that to the East
Stood open-eyed, but hidden from all eyes
Save seaward. At its portal, softly strewn
With shell and seaweed, cool reluctant waves
Bent solemn and aloof; and chaste sweet winds
For ever fanned a soft eternal fire
That burned but flamed not. Under its glimmering arch
Lay a deep pool, thro' whose untroubled heart
The tides of all the seas of all the worlds
Had passed, and in the passing purer grew
Because of Her who from its soft green marge
Slipped like a moonbeam thro' a happy cloud
That wrapped it in white love. Thence, newly risen
And radiant, Niav, from the brightening cave,
Stretched gleaming arms to greet the new fair Morn
That burned along the sea, and from Her feet
That glistened in moon-whiteness upward climbed
And clothed Her in yellow gold, and o'er Her brow
Set flickering stars among Her wet blown hair.
And as She stood, there came a little cry

... Far . . . faint . . . that called Her heart into Her eyes
With memory of swift voices thro' the night
Whispering Her name from star to star close-linked
Into a cincture narrowing round the world.
And as She looked, the cry across the waves
Ran like a flame, and with it glittering sails
Swept North and South, . . . and ere She looked again
Fresh-robed, had compassed all Her Isle, and surged
One wave of war on the resounding seas,
And ever nearer drew until She saw
Her Lord, and cried "He is come." Across the roar
Of throats that thundered shoreward came the cry
And smote Lir's heart with joy. Whereat He leaped
Forth from His Ship, and flung the sea aside,
And, ere the arrows of the Nameless King
Put out the sun, bore Niav on His breast
Unto His Ship, and sailed amid a shout
Of triumph homeward.

* * * * *

Thereafter, Lir and Niav

Passed thro' white Love from peace to peace, and drew
The Seven Isles in love about their throne;
And Mananaun was born, Who, fully grown
To strength made sweet with beauty, took the crown,
And reigned : of whom the Bards upon their staves
Have cut great songs and chant them thro' the world.

THE QUEST

*THEY said: "She dwelleth in some place apart,
Immortal Truth, within whose eyes
Who looks may find the secret of the skies
And healing for life's smart."*

*I sought Her in loud caverns underground,—
On heights where lightnings flashed and fell;
I scaled high Heaven; I stormed the gates of Hell,
But Her I never found*

*Till thro' the tumults of my Quest I caught
A whisper: "Here, within thy heart,
I dwell; for I am thou: behold, thou art
The Seeker—and the Sought."*

THE COMING OF PSYCHE

SOFTLY, as comes a wind across the sea
That thrills the waves to music on the beach,
And stirs the trees to whisperings each to each,
And bids the birds pipe low sweet songs of glee ;
So, like a summer morning, came to me
My Queen, my Psyche,—and her gentle speech
Spake regal lineage longer than the reach
Of memory, older than the thrones that be.

And thro' dark tumults that around me rise
She speaks of hidden and tremendous things :
Grails yet unwon, and Quests that never cease ;
And calls me forth to where, with quenchless eyes,
She dwells among the stars, and folds her wings
Enthroned in vast, unutterable Peace.

LOVE'S INFINITY

SINCE first my heart awoke to winds that blew
Infinite need, lo ! it has climbed its stair
Of dreams, and to the unresponsive air
Stretched hungry hands, and called . . . and called . . . for
you.

Then, answerless, it moulded of the dew,
And splendid noons, and sunset's tumbled hair,
And deep sea-music, something more than fair
Which long it strove to know—but never knew.

And now your cheek is warm against my cheek :
Yet, is Love satisfied ? Nay ! . . . evermore
Thy hands are full of promise, and thine eyes
Gleam with a spirit light I still must seek
But never find ; for joy has joy in store,
And heaven another heaven within its skies.

IN THE CAVES OF KESH

In and out among the caverns
You and I in gladness flit;
At the door of rocky taverns
Panting, pause,—a moment sit
Drinking from the bowl of silence
All the solemn joy of it.

Here unheard the wild wind rages ;
Here in peace austere, profound,
Mighty Shades of warring ages
Gather silently around
Just within the shadowy portals
Of the doors of sight and sound.

One by one a cloudy finger
Beckons them to rest again
Where in deeper darkness linger
Sounds as if some ancient strain
Whispered through the hollow vastness
Of some dead old poet's brain.

SIRIUS

THE Sun, a ruddy-visaged Sower
Pacing backward toward the West,
Scatters prodigally o'er
Furrowed fields his feet have pressed,
Seeds that quicken
In an hour—
Quicken, thicken,
Bud and flower
For a nosegay for my dearest.
Which, Love, shall I gather?—
Pale pure buds far North, or, rather
That one shining clearest—
Fluttering flower-like on its stem,
Red and green—
Sparkling like a diadem
On the forehead of a queen—
Changing with the changeless grace
Of thy face,
My dearest, nearest—

Throbbingly, with stop and start

Like the heart

Of a frail and human

Woman

Pausing, panting,

Slyly slanting

Roguish glance—

Then away, with a leap and a laugh in a dance

Delirious ?

Sirius !

TO EIRE

To Thee, Beloved, of old there came
The sailers of a thousand ships
Who learned to love Thy hidden name,
And love the music on Thy lips ;

But some, who thought to build Thy pyre
And on its ruin rear a throne,
Have loved to sit around Thy fire
And count Thy saddest songs their own ;

And sons of Thine, who broke love's bands
To seek a fabled far-off shore,
Grove thro' the world with aching hands,
And hunger for Thee evermore ;

For, tho' Thy sorrow may not cease,
Tho', blessing, Thou art still unblest,
Thou hast for men a Gift of Peace,
O Daughter of Divine Unrest !

NOTE

DAGDA : The Zeus of Irish Mythology.

(*The Irish Mythological Cycle*, de Jubainville,
p. 9.)

DANA : The Mother of the Irish Gods.

(*Celtic Heathendom*, Rhys, p. 89.)

THE SLEEP OF THE KING, founded on the legend of *Connla of the Golden Hair* (*Old Celtic Romances*, Joyce, p. 106), was the first play performed by the Irish National Theatre Society, October, 1902.

LIR : The Father of Mananaun, the Irish Sea-God.

(*The Story of Ireland*, O'Grady, p. 6.)



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